

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
18 MARCH 2015**

Present: Councillor Hacker (Chair);
Councillors D Absolom, Davies, Dennis, K Edwards, Gittings, Hopper,
James, Livingston, O'Connell, Terry, J Williams and R Williams.

Apologies: Councillors Anderson and Stanway.

19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 19 November 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Community Safety Partnership - 3 December 2014.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

21. PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 36

Pedro Springer/ Amanda Walsh presented a petition in the following terms:

Open the access gate on Wokingham Road to Reading Cemetery at Cemetery Junction to give local residents the choice to walk through this green space

"We feel that increased access to this green space would be beneficial for the wellbeing of East Reading residents and provides a safer and more pleasant route than the busy A329 when walking to Palmer Park.

We appreciate that the following concerns may be raised:

- Disruption/ escape of the muntjac deer in the cemetery;
- Concerns from St Batholomews Road residents.

The cemetery arch is open all day and as far as I am aware the deer do not run out into the road although they can be seen grazing quite close to it. The cemetery is a wide space and we do not anticipate vast numbers using this route.

The residents have voiced concerns that burglary rates will increase if the access gate is open in the day between 8am to 8pm (currently there is a security firm who close the front gates, we would suggest that they simply closed and opened the side gate also) this would incur minimum costs to the Council. Also although we do not have the exact figures for burglary rates for when the gate was opened historically we proposed that a trial period be arranged as now that burglary rates are generally lower in the area (Thames Valley Policy crime statistics 2014) this may alleviate residents' concerns. Moreover generally better access to the cemetery by local people will hopefully discourage anti-social behaviour and the fact that the cemetery arch now houses a police station should also help.

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Some clearing work (branches/grass etc) may be needed around the area of the access gate which we would propose to get a group of volunteers to help us with.”

In her response, Councillor Hacker (Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee) stated:

Officers are looking at a number of options.

There are a number of considerations to be made which include:

- the financial implications for any changes
- collaboration with the police
- and a public and grave owner consultation.

Following this exercise a report will be presented to a future HNL committee.

22. THE FIRST STOP BUS

Vicky Parting, FIRST stop bus project coordinator, gave a presentation on the FIRST stop bus, which was owned by Reading Borough Council and contracted out to the Mustard Tree Foundation. The presentation included a review of the partnership working involved, how the operation worked, the outcomes achieved so far and future plans for the project.

Resolved - That Vicky Parting be thanked for her presentation.

23. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR ACTION PLAN

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out the private rented sector action plan which had been developed to enable an approach to work to improve standards in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) through education, partnership and where necessary enforcement. The draft action plan included a draft PRS Charter, which aimed to build a common understanding of values, standards and requirements for the sector.

The Private Rented Sector Code of Practice, published by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), was attached to the report at Appendix 1, the Department for Communities and Local Government’s Draft Tenants Charter was attached to the report at Appendix 2, and Plymouth City Council’s draft Charter for Private Rented Housing was attached to the report at Appendix 3.

The report detailed all the services that would be implemented and the proposed works that would go into improving standards in the PRS and implementing the action plan. The report stated that it was proposed to embed a Trading Standards role within the Private Rented Sector Housing team and to appoint two full time officers to deliver the PRS action plan. One of the key roles of these officers would be to work with partners to gather intelligence on the location of vulnerable tenants and high risk properties, using this to target advice and enforcement action, where necessary. It was hoped that working differently with the sector would help to reduce the number of enforcement related service requests. Some of the other proposed works included launching a new campaign and materials and establishing a ‘rent with confidence’ scheme.

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The report also stated that a PRS Charter would be developed and would be based around 'providing a home for those most in need' as outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-2018.

Resolved -

That the following services be implemented:

- (1) launch a new campaign and materials to:**
 - raise awareness about the advice and services available to landlords and tenants
 - increase the identification and referral of sub-standard properties
 - promote tenants' rights and responsibilities
 - educate landlords on their responsibilities
- (2) improve mechanisms to identify and target vulnerable groups most at risk from rogue landlord activity, to ensure support is focused on those most in need;**
- (3) establish a corporate approach to managing the negative impacts that high levels of tenure turn over can have on communities;**
- (4) to consult on a private rented sector charter, which demonstrates the Council's and partner's commitment to improving the sector;**
- (5) establish a working group to explore with partners and stakeholders a 'Rent with Confidence' scheme aimed at building consumer confidence and helping to differentiate landlord sub-sectors;**
- (6) to review the outcomes of implementing the private rented sector action plan and wider housing strategy to determine whether further consideration should be given to discretionary licensing in the private rented sector.**

24. HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT (HECA) REPORT

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which set out the Council's updated HECA report, updating fuel poverty and other information and outlining intended actions for 2015-2017 in accordance with the Council's corporate plan. The HECA report and Action Plan were attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report stated that the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) required Local Authorities to produce a report every two years on plans to improve the energy efficiency of housing with its area across tenure. The HECA report set out the Council's strategic approach to reducing the carbon footprint of housing and contributing to the reduction of fuel poverty. The HECA report included an action

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plan, which detailed the specific actions proposed for the period 2015-2017. The report also set out the details of previous programmes and the progress that had been made to improve the thermal comfort and energy efficiency of Reading's housing stock.

Resolved - That the HECA report, which sets out the Council's intended strategic approach to improve the energy efficiency of the Borough's housing for the period 2015-2017 and its submission to the Department of Energy and Climate Change, be approved.

25. COUNCIL HOUSING TENANCY POLICY AND TENANCY AGREEMENT

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which set out the main changes and revisions that had been proposed for Reading Borough Council's Housing Tenancy Agreement. The report also set out the main provisions for a new Tenancy Policy which would complement and support the revised Tenancy Agreement.

The Equality Impact Assessment that had been completed was attached to the report at Appendix A. The Tenancy Policy 2014-2019 was attached to the report at Appendix B and the draft Tenancy Agreement was attached to the report at Appendix C.

The report stated that the purpose of the Tenancy Policy was to set out the Council's approach to tenancy management. In addition, the policy must clarify how the Council would support tenancy sustainment, tackle tenancy fraud, and manage discretionary succession rights. The policy was applicable to tenants of Reading Borough Council, including those in the North Whitley PFI area. The report stated that currently the Housing Service had a range of different policies relating to various aspects of Housing, Estate and Neighbourhood policy. The Tenancy Policy would collate a number of housing policies in one document and had been subject to consultation with tenant groups.

The report stated that the Tenancy Agreement had been reviewed and updated on three occasions over the past 15 years, in 2001, 2007 and 2009. The report set out the reasons for recommending a review of the Tenancy Agreement at this time and the key changes that were proposed. The Tenancy Agreement was subject to a formal and prescriptive consultation process with tenants, as set out in Section 103 of the Housing Act 1985, and the report detailed the scope and timescales for the consultation.

Resolved -

- (1) That the new Landlord Tenancy Policy, which collates current policy and is not subject to wider consultation, be approved;**
- (2) That the key changes proposed to Reading Borough Council's Housing Tenancy Agreement be noted and the draft Agreement be approved for consultation;**

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- (3) That the process for consultation be agreed and the serving of a Housing Act 1985 Section 103 Preliminary Variation Notice on tenants, inviting tenants to comment on the draft Tenancy Agreement, be approved.

26. WASTE MINIMISATION STRATEGY FOR READING - CONSULTATION RESULTS

Further to Minute 16 of the meeting held on 19 November 2014, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the results of the Waste Minimisation Strategy consultation.

The report stated that the strategy has been subject to a four week web based consultation. 33 responses had been received which were attached, along with the Council's response, to the report at Appendix A. The proposed Waste Minimisation Strategy was attached to the report at Appendix B.

At the invitation of the Chair, Enrico Petrucco addressed the Committee.

Resolved -

- (1) That the results of the Waste Minimisation Strategy consultation and the comments received be noted;
- (2) That the Waste Minimisation Strategy be adopted as proposed;
- (3) That the Head of Transportation and Streetcare, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods, be delegated authority to make amendments to the action plan as required;
- (4) That an annual progress report be submitted to the Committee to update on progress.

27. NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING IMPLEMENTATION

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report detailing the implementation of the Council's new neighbourhood working approach. A neighbourhood working area map was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report stated that nine area-based teams had been set up across Reading, responding to a range of neighbourhood issues including litter, graffiti, fly-tipping, grass cutting and maintenance of public spaces, crime and fear of crime, speeding, road safety and street drinking. The neighbourhood teams were made up of a variety of existing streetcare, parks and open spaces, housing, anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood initiative officers. Each area or patch would have a designated Neighbourhood Officer covering inspections and liaison for all Council land (including highways, Housing, Open Spaces and Parks). This new approach would ensure the effective coordination of services for local residents at a neighbourhood level.

Resolved - That the new approach and launch of neighbourhood working be noted.

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28. READING WINTER ON ICE - OVERVIEW

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an overview of the 'Reading Winter on Ice' event, hosted at the Forbury Gardens between 9 December 2014 and 4 January 2015.

The report stated that the focal point of the event was the 360 sq m real ice rink which was accompanied by other activities including: themed amusement rides, festive chalets offering a range of seasonal foods, a bar operated by Oxfordshire Brewery and a programme of musical performances from within the site's bandstand. The total number of visits was calculated as being in excess of 100,000.

The report stated that the operator had made a bonded payment to the local authority to cover the anticipated cost of required post event reinstatement of the gardens. Reinstatement work commenced immediately as the site began to clear from 5 January 2015 and had progressed well.

It was proposed that officers entered into discussion with the event operator, Billy Williams & Sons, regarding terms for the granting of a three year licence for the delivery of this event for 2015-2017. The activity would continue to be coordinated with the Reading UK CIC/BID team to ensure a cohesive Christmas offer.

Resolved -

- (1) That the overall success of the 'Reading Winter on Ice' event 2014, which was delivered at no cost to the Council, be noted;**
- (2) That the proposal for officers to negotiate terms for the granting of a three year licence to Billy Williams & Sons for the delivery of 'Reading Winter on Ice' at the Forbury Gardens (2015-2017) be approved.**

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.05pm).